

Catch and Keep

The complete angler uses the resource wisely, keeping only those fish he or she will use for the table, and releases the rest. Most species of Idaho gamefish make excellent eating as long as they are cared for properly from the moment they are released from the hook.

Here are a few tips:


- Get the fish on ice as soon as possible. This is especially true for trout. If ice is not readily available, a creel made of porous material with a bed of watercress or wet grass will work for a short time.
- Warm water fish can be kept in a live well or on a stringer until you are done fishing each day. A great way to prepare them is as "ready-to-cook" fillets.
- Place the fish on the cutting board with head to the right (left, if you are left-handed), and the back toward you. With a sharp knife, cut through the skin and flesh behind the head to the backbone and cut toward the tail. Turn the fish over, repeat on the other side, remove skin from the meat and your fillet is ready.





- Long-term storage is best accomplished by freezing fish in water. Old cardboard milk containers or plastic zip lock bags work great. Freeze as many fish or fillets as you will need for a single meal in one container. Remember, it is best not to refreeze thawed fish. You may wish instead to wrap in plastic, then double-wrap in freezer paper. Since fish tend to freezer burn and break down quickly, be sure to date your packages and use older ones first.


Catch and Release

Knowledge about how to safely release fish which are not to be harvested, either by personal choice, or because of specific rules, is important for each angler to know. Careful handling of the fish will increase its chance of survival. Here are some simple guidelines to help you:

 Some areas require use of a barbless hook. You may bend the barb down on your standard hook or use a barbless hook.

 Once the fish has been hooked, retrieve it quickly. Over playing the fish will cause undue stress.

 If hooked in the lip, hold the hook shank, pull back out with a gentle shake. If it is hooked more securely wet one hand to hold the fish, keeping it in the water as much as possible (DO NOT HOLD BY THE GILLS), then with fingers or pliers secure the shank of the hook and back it out.

 If the hook is imbedded in the tongue, throat or gills, cut the line as close to the hook as possible. If the fish does not swim readily away, hold it upright and move gently back and forth through the water until it swims away.



Panfish — Crappie, Bluegill and Perch

They don't call crappie and bluegill panfish for nothing - they're good eating!

Plus, they're fun and relatively easy to catch.

"Panfish are the perfect fish for kids to catch. There's lots of action," says Al Van Vooren, Region 3 supervisor for the Idaho Department of Fish and Game.

Spring is the best time to fish for these species because they are spawning in shallow water close to shore. They travel in schools, and once the school is found, the fishing can be furious.

Popular destinations for crappie include Brownlee Reservoir and C.J. Strike Reservoir in southern Idaho, Mann Lake near Lewiston and Hayden Lake near Coeur d'Alene.

Bluegill can be found in a wide variety of lakes in Idaho, but there is no one particular spot. Many lakes in the Idaho Panhandle support bluegill. Look in the fishing guide for destinations and try them out.

The same principle applies to perch. Many Idaho lakes support good populations of perch. Read over the fishing guide for specific destinations and see what you find.

For equipment, IDFG experts recommend using light-weight rods, lines (four pound test or less) and lures for panfish. Perch can be caught with worms or strips of cutbait fished close to the bottom. Crappies will go after 1/16 ounce or smaller jigs, lead-head hair jigs and rubber-tube jigs.

Bluegill will be attracted to artificial lures, worms and marshmallows. Be sure to use a small hook, small bait and a small bobber because bluegill have a small mouth and they're not very big.

Fish with Snow Peas*

1/3 lb. crappie or perch fillets
1/2 onion, 1 inch pieces
1 clove garlic, minced
2 -3 T oil for stir-frying

- Stir-fry fish in a little oil until cooked.
- Set aside. Stir-fry garlic in 2 T oil until garlic is slightly brown.
- Add onions and quickly stir-fry for a minute.

1/3 lb. snow peas, with tips removed
1/2 C water chestnuts, sliced
1/2 C bamboo shoots, sliced

- Add snow peas, water chestnuts, and bamboo shoots.
- Stir-fry until vegetables are cooked. Do not overcook.

1 T soy sauce
1/2 t MSG
1/2 t sugar
1/2 t sesame oil
Salt and pepper to taste

- Add cooked fish and all remaining ingredients.
- Stir until everything is thoroughly mixed. Serves 1-2.

*Cheryl Bridges
Boise*

* From *Idaho's Wild 100 - Recipes from the Idaho Department of Fish and Game*